

SINGAPORE ACADEMY OF LAW
APPRECIATION & AWARDS DINNER 2022

Opening Address

Tuesday, 30 August 2022

The Honourable the Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon
Supreme Court of Singapore

1. It really is wonderful to see all of you in person this evening. It has been a while since we last met like this. The previous time we had the SAL Appreciation Dinner was in August 2019, exactly three years ago. And none of us could have foreseen the upheaval that would unfold very shortly after that. The past three years have been very, very long years for all of us in Singapore, around the world, and for us as a legal profession. We were reminded of that time by the short video on our profession's response to COVID-19 that was put together by the SAL Legal Heritage Advisory Committee and I thank them for that. It is good to remind ourselves of what we have all been through, and that is why we are here today: to celebrate the fact that we have been through it together. We have come out at the other end. And I think we are stronger for that. These last three years have been filled with challenges, but they have also been transformative years in which we, as a profession, have experienced and indeed shepherded a sea change in the administration of justice and the practice of law. And today I want to thank you and to acknowledge the hard work that so many of you have devoted yourselves to, in order to help us continue with the administration of justice in Singapore.
2. Over the last three years, the work of the Academy has continued – it has not let up. I will endeavour in a few minutes to sum up, at least in broad strokes, the highlights of what we as a community have done over the last three years. And I will try and do that in the time that we usually have to cover the work that we do in a single year. I think the best way to think about it is in terms of three phases.
3. In the first phase, the Academy responded to the disruptions that were caused by the pandemic. In the second phase, we had to move towards innovating and continuing to try to

excel. It was no more about being reactive but rather about being proactive. And now in the third phase, we are looking ahead and thinking about how we can be better prepared for the future.

I. Responding to the pandemic

4. Let me start with the early days of the pandemic. It is a time we recall for many things, including in particular, in the context of this community, our solidarity in the face of adversity.
5. In May 2020, shortly after the first circuit breaker period, the Academy rolled out its first round of measures to help members impacted by COVID-19. This was quickly followed by two further rounds of support packages in October 2020 and March 2021. In all more than 9,000 members received \$2.5 million in credits, which were supplemented by fee waivers and free resources provided by the Academy. These support packages, with a total value of around \$7 million, helped the profession in its efforts to continue both practising and learning the law.
6. Beyond serving its members, the Academy also adapted to serve the needs of our wider society. Together with the Singapore Mediation Centre (SMC), we organised free webinars on issues related to the pandemic for practitioners, as well as for members of the public. Close to 3,000 participants benefited from these efforts. The SMC also partnered with the Supreme Court to administer the SGUnited Mediation Initiative in 2020 – mediating more than 100 large commercial cases at no charge. That helped us free up a lot of court days. I am very happy to share that by the end of the first year we had recovered most of the time that we had lost as a result of the disruptions caused by the pandemic. I really want to express my heartfelt appreciation to all those who volunteered their time and expertise to provide these vital services to the public.
7. A lot of credit is also due to the team at the SMC for launching an e-Filing system for adjudications under the Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act. They did this within two weeks of the circuit breaker coming into effect. The construction industry was particularly affected by the pandemic and these efforts allowed continued access to this critical dispute resolution mechanism. The SMC also supported other government agencies in setting up bespoke dispute resolution processes under the COVID-19 (Temporary Measures) Act, such as those under the Ministry of Law's Re-Align Framework.

II. Innovating and excelling

8. Even as we grappled with the impact of the pandemic, we did manage to find ways to continue innovating and trying to do our very best. As a result, the Academy's work in promoting and developing Singapore law and Singapore lawyers could continue.
9. One of the largest events in our annual legal calendar is TechLaw.Fest. Once the extent of the disruptions occasioned by the pandemic became clear, the team behind TechLaw.Fest rushed to take the conference online. For many of us attending the conference in 2020, it would have been the first time we witnessed the potential of technology to facilitate a gathering of thousands of participants in a virtual conference space. The scale and ambition of the online editions of TechLaw.Fest in 2020 and 2021, and the hybrid edition this year, sent a clear signal that Singapore was ready to be the site where the future of law and technology could be developed. Kudos to the team for pulling this off with style!
10. A further benefit of moving online is that learning can now take place asynchronously. On that front, the Academy launched the LIFTED-LinkedIn initiative in August 2021, which provides access to curated courses on LinkedIn Learning. Together with the launch, the Academy offered 5,000 free one-year licenses to members. These were well-subscribed. Moving forward, members will be able to continue accessing these resources, including original courses that were developed by the Academy, by paying a license fee, and I hope that having already experienced its benefits many of you will continue to do so.
11. Learning on the job is an equally important part of the training of lawyers. Crucially, for young advocates, this requires adequate opportunities to get up on their feet in court. To that end, next month the Professional Development and Practice Chapter and Young Members Chapter will launch the Guide on the Development of Junior Civil Commercial Litigators in Oral Advocacy, which will set out quantitative and qualitative markers of the kind of advocacy opportunities that should be offered to young advocates at different stages. The Professional Affairs Committee and its sub-committees have also worked tirelessly to offer practical training through webinars, online workshops and the launch of digital guides.
12. The other key facet of the Academy's mission is to promote and develop Singapore law. On this front, the Academy's Commissioning Panel and Publications Committee oversaw the publication of 39 new titles in 2020 and 2021, and hundreds of journal articles. This was

supplemented by the work of the Asian Business Law Institute, which put out 25 publications and numerous webinars focused on Asian law. To help bring members closer to this vast collection of knowledge, a new digital library service, Academy Library, was launched in October 2021 with a free six-month trial available to all members. This gave them ready access to Academy Publishing titles as well as select LexisNexis publications.

13. Academy Library forms a part of the newly launched LawNet.com: the next iteration of LawNet, which has been a part of our lives for almost 30 years! With LawNet.com, the Academy has completely re-designed LawNet as a one-stop hub for legal content and services. In addition to Academy Library, the portal includes LawNet Asian Insights, the Intelligent Case Retrieval System featuring personal injury cases and awards, and the Commercial Precedents database, which is populated with contributions from many leading law firms, and which has proved to be useful and extremely popular with our members. So again, thank you for that.

III. Looking to the future

14. Turning to the future, as we developed LawNet.com, the Academy upgraded and transformed its technological capabilities, and built an in-house technology team. Recognising the importance of having a strong team to deliver on the Academy's vision for digital transformation, the Senate decided to house our technology team in a new tech-driven subsidiary, which I announced at the Opening of this Legal Year. Justice Kwek Mean Luck has been chairing the steering committee for the reorganisation. In April, LawNet Technology Services (or "LTS") was formally incorporated and it is currently preparing to commence operations before our next financial year. LTS will oversee and steer the development of bold and innovative products and services that will more fully harness technology in knowledge management and legal analytics, and will be led by a board comprising members with the appropriate domain expertise. I would also like to introduce Mr Kenta Kusano as its Chief Executive. I take this opportunity to congratulate the staff of LTS on this transition and wish them all the best on this exciting journey.
15. Looking further ahead, much of our efforts will be focused on two areas: the first is that of technology in the law, which I have just touched on; and the second is the need for legal professionals of the future to have multiple skillsets. This is the subject of the Academy's ongoing effort to update our suite of learning and development tools and programmes. To

reflect the Academy's role and direction moving forward, it has adopted an updated mission, which is "Enabling Future-Ready Trusted Legal Professionals". We are in a period of great change and we will work with you to meet the challenges that lie ahead. We will reveal more as our plans develop.

IV. Awards

16. I hope that has given you a sense of what we have been doing and what we can look forward to. But I want to return to the present, for tonight, which is really about appreciation and giving thanks to all of you, for the tremendous work you have done. I would like to close by directing some much-deserved attention to acknowledging some of the particular highlights of the accomplishments of the past three years. Over the course of this evening, it will be my pleasure and privilege to present awards in recognition of the achievements of five SAL members who have been singled out for demonstrating the Academy's core values of professional excellence and service to the profession.

17. The first category of awards is the Singapore Academy of Law Awards. The SAL Merit Awards are given for service in promoting and advancing the objectives of the Academy. The 2021 SAL Merit Awardees are:
 - (a) Dr Stanley Lai SC, for his contributions to the organisation of TechLaw.Fest;
 - (b) Mr Thio Shen Yi SC, for his leadership of the Corporate Social Responsibility Sub-Committee, which has raised over \$1,000,000 for the bursary set up by SAL and the Yellow Ribbon Fund;¹ and
 - (c) Mr Jern-Fei Ng QC, for his contributions to the work of the Foreign Lawyers Chapter of the Professional Affairs Committee.

18. The Singapore Law Merit Awards are given for service to the development of Singapore law. The 2021 Singapore Law Merit Award goes to Professor Simon Chesterman for his contributions to the work of the Academy in promoting Singapore law throughout the region.

19. The final award is the Joseph Grimberg Outstanding Young Advocate Award 2021. This award was launched in 2017 to honour Joe Grimberg's tremendous contributions to the law and to

¹ The Yellow Ribbon Fund–SAL Skills Training Assistance to Restart (STAR) Bursary.

our profession. Those who have had the privilege of working with Joe will attest not only to his exceptional advocacy, but also to his leadership and his passion for developing young talent. The Joseph Grimberg Outstanding Young Advocate Award recognises exceptional young lawyers who exemplify the Academy's core values. The 2021 Award goes to Mr Mahesh Rai from Drew & Napier LLC.

V. Conclusion

20. I would again like to thank all of you and commend the legal profession for having risen to the challenges that were posed by the pandemic: we have stood together, we have rallied to give back to the community, and reaffirmed our commitment to the core values that we share as an honourable profession. It is important that we take to heart the valuable lessons that we have learnt over the past three years and make use of them to meaningfully transform legal practice in Singapore and prepare the profession to meet the challenges of the future. In that endeavour, the Academy is fortunate to count on the expertise and dedication of its many members and supporters who serve on our Senate, Boards, Committees and Sub-committees, all of whom generously give their time and efforts to help us fulfil our mission.
21. I would also like to thank the outgoing Senate members, making a special mention of Mr Giam Chin Toon SC, who will be stepping down as the Chair of the Board of Commissioners for Oaths & Notaries Public: an appointment that Mr Giam has held since 2010. Mr Giam's service to the profession goes all the way back to 1987, 35 years ago, when he served as President of the Law Society. Over the years, Mr Giam has served in numerous capacities and made countless contributions to his profession and to the Academy, and we thank him for his faithfulness, support and generosity over so many years.
22. And finally, again I thank you; I extend my deep gratitude to all of you for your spirit of service and for your support. I hope you have a wonderful evening. Thank you.